

## **KEY POINTS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT ANONYMISATION**

### **WHAT**

- The process of anonymisation involves the removal of personal identifiers from a dataset to minimise the risk of disclosure.

### **WHO**

- Data custodians may want to require that data is anonymised before researchers are given access to it to ensure that risks to patient confidentiality are minimised.
- Researchers may find it easier to gain authorisation for research conducted using anonymised patient data, but this may not always be suitable for the purposes of research
- Researchers will need to ensure that statistical disclosure control is conducted on their results to ensure these are not patient identifying.

### **WHY**

- It will sometimes be possible to anonymise the data and thus enable its use without consent and without having to comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998.
- Anonymisation of data is also one means of addressing ethical concerns about the respecting patient confidentiality and their autonomous wishes to decide what is done with their personal data.
- You should bear in mind that it is often technically challenging to achieve absolute anonymisation of data. But, consent or anonymisation are not the only possible routes to lawful, ethical research uses of patient data, approval by the relevant authorisation body may be a viable alternative.

### **WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?**

- If consent does not exist for the proposed research use of patient data then it must be anonymised, where possible, and the appropriate level of authorisation sought providing access to / accessing the data.
- Researchers should not attempt to re-identify subjects of anonymised data.
- SHIP can provide both anonymisation and statistical disclosure control services. The SHIP Safe Haven provides indexing linking services which will allow researchers to access richer pseudo-anonymised datasets without being able to identify the data subjects.